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# Verb for 'to butcher, to kill' from 'flesh' -- an attempt in Burmo-Qiangic dialectology

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# Verb for ‘to butcher, to kill’ from ‘flesh’ – an attempt in Burmo-Qiangic dialectology

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SOAS

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## *Upper Rgyalrong*

Zbu Rgyalrong (Rgyaltsu): *kə-ntché?* (*ntché ntchî ntchó\**)

- (0.1) *ɕəkhri̯ kəpé?*      *nə-ntchó?*  
there: E Han.Chinese IMP-kill<sub>3</sub>  
‘Kill the Han Chinese over there!’ (robbers)

### Other Zbu dialects:

- Central Zbu: (*ntfhē ntchî ntchō*) ‘to kill’ (Sun, 2004);
- High zbu (Wampa): (*ntché ntchî*) ‘to skin (an recently slaughtered animal)’;
- Zbu B (Zamgo): (*ntcho ntchî*) ‘to kill’.

Pre-zbu : \**n-ɕá* \**n-ɕâ* \**n-ɕáw*

### Other Upper Rgyalrong languages:

- Japhug: *kɣ-ntcha* ‘to kill, to cut up (animal)’ (Jacques, 2016);
- Tshobdun: *kə-ntché* ‘kill (vt), 杀’ (DB-CAOA *ka*’ *ntché*, DB-CAOB *ka*’ *ntché*, #0671); *kə-ntfhê* (*ntfhê ntfhé?*) ‘kill’ (Sun, 2014 inter alia).

### Situ/Eastern Rgyalrong:

- Cogtse : *ka-ntfhâ* ‘butcher, dissect, 宰殺, 解剖’ (*ntfhâ ntfhê*) (Huáng and Sün, 2002; Lín, 2003);
- Kyom-kyo : *ka-ntfhâ* ‘butcher’ (Prins, 2016);
- *rGyalrongic Languages Database* (edited by Yasuhiko Nagano and Marielle Prins): in 29 Situ dialects (among 52), the primary translation of ‘to kill’ (DB-#671) is a cognate of *ka-ntfhâ*.

### West Rgyalrongic:

- Khroskyabs: *ŋcɛ̃* (*ŋcɛ̃* *ŋcɛ̃*) ‘tuer (un animal), 宰’ (Lai, 2017) ;
- Stau: *ntɕhə* ‘cut up, kill (animal)’ (Jacques et al., 2017)
- *Database* : 3 Stau-Horpa dialects (among 13), where the on primary translation of ‘to kill’ is a cognate of *ntɕhə* (DB-#671).

Tangut: 𐞗𐞧𐞮𐞫 0716 *śiji*<sup>1</sup>, stem B 𐞗𐞧𐞮𐞫 4571 *śioo*<sup>1</sup> ‘kill (animal)’<sup>1</sup> (Jacques, 2014, 97–98).

(0.2) 𪔐 𪔑 𪔒 𪔓  
0764 0716 3465 4517

*rji**jr*<sup>1</sup> *śji*<sup>1</sup> *tśhji*<sup>1</sup> *dzji*<sup>1</sup>  
horse butcher meat eat

‘butcher the horse and eat the meat’  
屠馬食肉 (The Art of War 26A-3, 26A-4a, Lin, 1994)

### Etymology :

The etymology of Japhug verb *kɣ-ntɕha* was discussed in Jacques (2014, 97–98). The point of reference is the Tibetan verb *bsha-ba* (*bsha bshas bsha shos*) ‘butcher’<sup>2</sup> which derives transparently from *sha* ‘flesh, meat’. There are two hypotheses on the relationship between the Rgyalrong verb and the Tibetan verb.

The first hypothesis, mentioned in Jacques (2014, 97–98), suggests that the Rgyalrong verb is a Rgyalrong-internal denominal from a flesh noun, taken in the sense of ‘meat’. Hence, the form is made with the short form of the N-denominalization *n-* based on one of the most widespread Sino-Tibetan nouns, reflected in Zbu as *céʔ*. Hence, the prenasalized affricate in most Rgyalrongic languages reflects an epenthetic form from *\*n-ɕa* akin to Khroskyabs *neɕ*.

Jacques (2014, 97–98), on the other hand, prefers another hypothesis suggested by Nathan Hill, that the verb *kɛ-ntɕhé?* is borrowed from the Tibetan *bsha-ba*, from a hypothetical stem <sup>†</sup>*cha*. Other denominals, like *ʼjo-ba* ‘to milk’ from *zho* ‘yoghurt < \*milk’ has a present stem which oscillates between *bzho* and *ʼjo*. In modern Tibetan

<sup>1</sup>Sea of characters: 𩚑 0716 𩚒 3583 𩚓 4571 𩚔 5285 𩚕 0697 𩚖 5285 𩚗 0487 𩚘 4225 𩚙 3614 𩚚 3708 𩚛 1139 𩚜 1278 𩚝 0716  
 𩚞 4571 𩚟 0697  
 alent to 𩚞 *śjoo*<sup>1</sup> et 𩚟 *taar*<sup>1</sup> (butcher and skin an animal), means killing something alive and cutting off life.'

𢵿 𢵾 𢵽 𢵼 𢵻 𢵺 𢵹 𢵸 𢵷 𢵶 𢵵 𢵴 𢵳 𢵲 𢵱 𢵰 𢵯 𢵮 𢵭 𢵬 𢵫 𢵪 𢵩 𢵨 𢵧 𢵦 𢵥  
 4571 3583 0716 5285 0697 5285 0487 4225 3614 3708 5113 1139 1278 5285 4571    *sjoo*<sup>1</sup>, equivalent to  
 𢵾 *sjii*<sup>1</sup> and 𢵽 *taar*<sup>1</sup> (butcher and skin an animal), means killing something alive and cutting off  
 0716 0697  
 life.'

<sup>2</sup>*Dag-yig gsar-bsgrigs* : *sha-pags kyi ched du sgo-phyugs sogs gsod-pa'i don* 'kill a domestic animal for meat or hide'

dialects which best preserves Old Tibetan conjugation, like Amdo Tibetan (Haller, 2004) or Zhongu (Sun, 2003), for both verbs, forms corresponding to OTib *bsha*’ and *bzho* are found in present.

To discuss the etymology of this verb, it is indispensable to discuss that of the noun *cé?*. The Japhug cognates of Zbu word, which means ‘flesh’ in general, are *ça* ‘raw meat’ et *tu-ça* ‘muscle’. Guillaume Jacques considers that *ça* belong to words for which ‘nous ne disposons pas de preuves qu’ils soient des cognats ou des emprunts’ (2004, 168), but judges the proposition ‘probable’ (2004, 168) or ‘selon toute vraisemblance’ (2014, 92) that the word is borrowed from Tibetan *sha*. If *cé?* and *tu-ça* are Tibetan borrowings, it would be chronologically difficult to postulate that *kə-ntché?* is a denominal from *cé?*.

According to the correspondence rules between Tibetan and Japhug, it is indeed impossible to tell if *ça/tu-ça* and Tib. *sha* are cognates or borrowings. On the other hand, in Zbu, a tonal language, we have a different situation. In Zbu, Tib. rime *-a* corresponds to *-é/-î* in inherited words, but to *ê* in words borrowed from Tibetan. This can be confirmed in cultural words where the borrowedness is certain: *təmdê* ‘rifle’ » < tib. *mda*, *mnê* ‘swearing’ < tib. *mna*, cf. *vəɽjî* ‘hundred’, cognate to Tib. *brgya*. The supposed form would be *†cé* if it is borrowed from Tibetan. However, there is one Tibetan borrowing that shows cognate phonology, *mphrəvî* ‘rosary’, Japhug *mphruwa* < tib. *phreng-ba*. The correspondence hence strongly suggests inherited cognacy, but is not unequivocal.

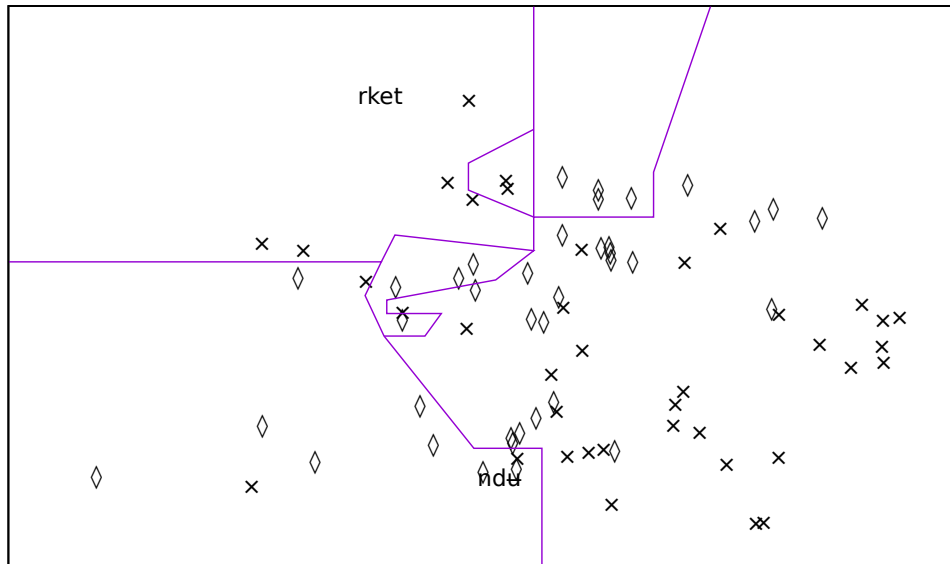
The cognacy to the Khroskyabs form, however, is best accounted for with a Rgyalrongic interpretation. The Khroskyabs form *ɲɕî* comes necessarily from a parallel formation < *\*n-ɕî*. It is more parsimonious to postulate the same formation in Khroskyabs and other Rgyalrongic languages.

In other Burmo-Qiangic languages, data suggest that the formation *\*n-ça* is older than Proto-Rgyalrongic: as Jacques (2014, 97–98) suggests, a connection can be drawn with the Tangut form 𐰇𐰏 *śjii*<sup>1</sup>, stem B 𐰇𐰏 *śjoo*<sup>1</sup>. In Burmo-Qiangic languages that are not Macro-Rgyalrongic, there are still parallels:

- In Ersuic languages (Yu, 2012), ‘kill/slaughter an animal’ is *\*ntʃhi*<sup>2</sup> (Kala Lizu *ntʃhɿ* ʎ), with the same rime as *\*ji*<sup>2</sup> ‘meat’ (Kala Lizu *ɕɿ* ʎ). It is obvious that there is a pre-proto-Ersuic formation *\*n-ji*<sup>2</sup> which made the proto-Ersuic *\*ntʃhi*<sup>2</sup>.
- Lolo-Burman are also possible witnesses of this formation. In Northern Yi (Liángshān), there is the verb *ɕu-ɿ* which means ‘[刚, butcher, cut up an animal and prepare its meat for cooking], homophone to *ɕu-ɿ* ‘meat’. Similarly, in Eastern Yi (Wēiníng), there is the verb *fu-ɿ* ‘kill’, homophone to the noun *fu-ɿ* ‘meat’. The semantic evolution is parallel to that in Rgyalrongic.

In the traditional script of Eastern Yi, ‘to kill’ is 𐰇 and ‘meat’ is 𐰏. It is possible that the Yi script reflects older non-homophony, a case which might

allow us to reconstruct a similar formation  $*n-xa^2$  in the older stage of Eastern Yi.



‘kill’ :

× : < ‘butcher’, Zbu *kɛ-ntɕhé?*

◊ : < common Sino-Tibetan root, Japhug *kɣ-sat*

*ndu*, *rket* : neither

Figure 1: Distribution of etymons of ‘to kill’ in Rgyalrongic languages

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